

# As refugees flee Syria, Germany equips schools for flood of students

By Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff on 09.15.15  
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German Chancellor Angela Merkel (right) speaks to the media after visiting a "Welcome Class," a special school class for migrants and refugees at the Ferdinand-Freiligrath school in Berlin, Germany, Sept. 10, 2015. Photo: AP Photo/Markus Schreiber

MUNICH, Germany — Syrian businessman Zaid Taha says he did it all for Yasser and Taha, ages 6 and 9. He and his family traveled by land across half of Europe in order to secure a good future for the boys. After enduring difficult times along the way, the family has finally reached safety in Germany.

"School for them, a good education — that is the most important thing there could ever be for me," Zaid Taha said. He and his family left Syria after a bomb fell near their home in the war-torn city of Aleppo, killing next-door neighbors.

"Education, that's their life," he said, laying one hand on each boy's head. "That's my goal. That's my heart."

An enormous stream of migrants and refugees has come pouring into Germany only days before the Sept. 15 start of the school year. Last weekend alone there were 20,000 new arrivals, each hoping to find a home in Europe. Educators say

it will be difficult to give many of the children the schooling they need. Many are disoriented and bewildered after a dangerous journey, and by the shocks of wartime life preceding it.

## **Education Is One Of The Casualties Of Syrian Conflict**

Syria's ferocious four-year conflict has disrupted schooling for millions of children. The parents of those now in Europe are determined to see them make up for lost ground and lost time.

As the tide of migrants and refugees has moved north and west one thing has been heard over and over: Education is the single most prized thing a new life in Europe has to offer. At chaotic border crossings, on jam-packed trains and buses and in refugee-reception centers, parent after parent has said they want their children to get a good education.

Germany's public schools now face the difficult task of taking in a huge number of new students. Most do not speak German and many have been traumatized by war and other harsh experiences. Some question whether the schools will be able to adjust.

Most of the newly arrived children are now in the German state of Bavaria, though many will be resettled elsewhere later. Most are not ready for regular classes, so they will first take special preparatory courses. Such courses will last from a few months to two years, depending on the student, after which students will be moved into regular classes.

## **Germany Ramping Up Prep Classes**

Students taking the preparatory courses will learn the German language. They will also be taught social customs that may be different from those with which they were raised. For example, boys and girls will be taught to look one another directly in the eye when speaking to each other.

The recent arrivals poured in so fast that officials in Munich, Bavaria's capital city, are not yet sure how many school-age children are among them. They hope to have a rough count by next week, before school starts.

The new students speak a range of languages, including Arabic, Somali and Dari, a form of Persian spoken in much of Afghanistan. The youngest will probably pick up German very quickly, educators say. Some newly arrived first-graders may be ready to be placed in "mainstream" classes after only a brief adjustment period.

## **Language Skills Put Young Children Under Pressure**

The ability of young children to learn languages very quickly can create its own problems, however. Sometimes even very small children find themselves the “managers” of their family. They are expected to translate for their family and to help with tasks such as doctors’ visits or filling out paperwork. The pressure of that responsibility can sometimes cause children to struggle in school.

Michael Stenger, who heads a group that teaches job skills to migrant and refugee youth, is concerned with another issue. He says many of the new students have been through terrible situations that may have lasting effects on them. Many teachers have not been trained to deal with the problems that war-traumatized children face, he said.

## **Children Of War Have Unique, Misunderstood Stresses**

“A teacher might not understand why a child who was doing so well initially suddenly begins to struggle,” he said. “Their situation is very complicated.”

How children fare in school will have lasting effects, not only for them, but for their families, experts say. If children thrive in school, it betters the family’s long-term chances of doing well in their new home.

“The children first have to calm down and start feeling safe,” said Monika Steinhauser, head of the Refugee Council, a refugee aid group. “They need normality, and going to school is something that helps them feel that things are normal.”

Zaid Taha, the businessman from Aleppo, said he and his family began studying German while temporarily sheltering in Turkey. His children quickly surpassed him, he said.

“Their minds are so fresh, so lively, so receptive,” he said. “They are like plants that must be watered with knowledge — but watered now.”

## Quiz

- 1 Which paragraph in the section "Education Is One Of The Casualties Of Syrian Conflict" explains the challenges of teaching new migrant and refugee students?
- 2 Read the sentence from the section "Education Is One Of The Casualties Of Syrian Conflict."

*As the tide of migrants and refugees has moved north and west one thing has been heard over and over: Education is the single most prized thing a new life in Europe has to offer.*

Which sentence from the article BEST develops the statement above?

- (A) Educators say it will be difficult to give many of the children the schooling they need.
  - (B) Germany's public schools now face the difficult task of taking in a huge number of new students.
  - (C) If children thrive in school, it betters the family's long-term chances of doing well in their new home.
  - (D) "Their minds are so fresh, so lively, so receptive," he said. "They are like plants that must be watered with knowledge — but watered now."
- 3 After reading the section "Language Skills Put Young Children Under Pressure," which of the following questions will you be able to answer?
    - (A) Why is teaching students from another country a challenge for schools?
    - (B) What determines whether students excel or struggle in a new school?
    - (C) Why is learning a new language easier for younger children than for their parents?
    - (D) What challenges might foreign students face when going to school in a new country?

- 4 Which of the following sentences from the article is LEAST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) Germany's public schools now face the difficult task of taking in a huge number of new students.
  - (B) He says many of the new students have been through terrible situations that may have lasting effects on them.
  - (C) Most of the newly arrived children are now in the German state of Bavaria, though many will be resettled elsewhere later.
  - (D) The recent arrivals poured in so fast that officials in Munich, Bavaria's capital city, are not yet sure how many school-age children are among them.

## Answer Key

- 1 Which paragraph in the section "Education Is One Of The Casualties Of Syrian Conflict" explains the challenges of teaching new migrant and refugee students?

**Paragraph 6:**

**Germany's public schools now face the difficult task of taking in a huge number of new students. Most do not speak German and many have been traumatized by war and other harsh experiences. Some question whether the schools will be able to adjust.**

- 2 Read the sentence from the section "Education Is One Of The Casualties Of Syrian Conflict."

*As the tide of migrants and refugees has moved north and west one thing has been heard over and over: Education is the single most prized thing a new life in Europe has to offer.*

Which sentence from the article BEST develops the statement above?

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